

# Personification

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**figurative language:** language that is used in an imaginative way to express ideas that are not literally true. Figurative language includes figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, and personification.

**personification:** a figure of speech in which human qualities are given to an object, animal, or idea

## HERE'S HOW

**Step 1: Identify personification.** Writers attribute human traits, feelings, actions, or physical characteristics to nonhuman elements.

**Step 2: Identify ways personification is used.** Personification of an animal may seem fun or cute, while personification of an abstract idea, such as love, may give a serious tone. Here are some ways personification is used:

- **Animal characters**

**EXAMPLE** The sly fox waited to play his devious trick on the silly rabbit.

- **Inanimate objects**

**EXAMPLE** The broken plate seemed to be laughing at me.

- **Places**

**EXAMPLE** Detroit is the friendliest big city I know.

- **Forces of nature**

**EXAMPLE** I heard the angry howl of the wind.

- **Abstract ideas**

**EXAMPLE** Justice is merciless.

**Step 3: Analyze effects of personification.** Notice the effect that each example of personification has on you. Ask yourself: What sort of person is the nonhuman element painted to be? What are its physical or personality traits? What is the tone of the personification?

## EXAMPLE: PERSONIFICATION

The wind **stood up** and **gave a shout**.  
He **whistled on his fingers** and  
**Kicked** the withered leaves about  
And thumped the branches with **his hand**.  
—James Stephen, “The Wind”

Wind can neither stand up nor shout. This language is figurative, not literal.

The attribution of childlike, mischievous activities to the wind, help the reader visualize a restless but joyful scene.